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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes changes in decision-making in France, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom and tries to identify trends in these countries' reforms. In general, the reforms initiated by these five countries redesigned the loci of decision-making between the government levels, modified the modes of decision at these levels, and redistributed the domains of decision. The process implied a substantial change of competencies and capacities in decision-making, which ultimately implemented a new accountability framework. The article outlines national educational reforms, offers a conceptual framework of autonomy and decentralization of power in bureaucratic organizations, gives indicators of loci of decision-making, and lists domains and types of decisions in the five countries. It was found that despite the geographic and economic differences among these countries, the initiated reforms contained some common features. Everywhere the aim was the decentralization of the loci of decision-making, the increase of local control, and the promotion of school autonomy. Nevertheless, analysis reveals deep differences in these reforms: the domains of decision transferred from the central to the local level varied, the distribution of responsibilities to the schools and local authorities was unequal, and the type and amount of power endorsed by the government were different. (Contains 12 endnotes.) (RJM)

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Autonomy and Decentralisation: Between Hopes and Illusions
A comparative study of reforms in five European countries

**Paper presented at the AERA Annual Meeting 2000,
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Executive Summary

In the last decades several European countries implemented some major reforms of their educational systems. This has been the case for the United Kingdom, Sweden, Spain, France and recently Italy. These are not small countries : the population size of England, France and Italy is larger than California; Sweden with a population of almost ten millions habitants is equivalent to a middle-sized US State and Spain with 40 millions habitants is larger than a middle-sized US State.

Despite the geographic and economic differences, the reforms of public education implemented in these countries present some common features. Everywhere the aim was the decentralisation of the loci of decision-making, increasing of local control and the promotion of the autonomy of schools. In all these countries, whatever the political majority governing the nation, the reform trends have been similar. In all these countries the aims of this movement were the improvement of the quality of education, the redistribution of power, the reduction of central control and an increase in accountability.

A comparative study of these reforms nevertheless reveals deep differences between these reforms: the domains of decision transferred from the central to the local level vary; the distribution of responsibilities to the schools and local authorities is very unequal from one

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country to another; the type and amount of power endorsed *exercised* by the State are different. A taxonomy of the changes of the modes of pedagogical and administrative control reveals an opposition between North and South of Europe. The autonomy of schools has a different meaning in the five countries, as it is easy to see by examining the types of decision that schools can take. Links between these reforms and achievements are difficult to establish, but preliminary figures suggest that results are stable. If this observation is confirmed, it will be necessary to conclude that expectations about these reforms are often illusions from the point of view of student achievement.

The comparisons suggest the presence of at least three main commonalities: the focus on evaluation; on accountability; and a great concern with regard to educational expenditures. It is nevertheless too early to conclude that these elements could constitute the core of a common education policy in Europe.

Outline

1. Presentation of some national educational reforms
2. The conceptual framework of autonomy and decentralisation of power in bureaucratic organisations
3. Indicators of loci of decision-making: the OECD surveys
4. Domains and types of decisions in Five European Educational reforms

1. Presentation of some national educational reforms

Since the end of the 80ies educational reforms in Europe have been focused on decentralisation of power and autonomy of schools. One of the fundamental aspects of educational reforms in the EU Members States during the decade 1984 - 1994 has been the changes in educational

administration, and above all the redistribution of decision-making responsibilities to the various administrative levels: central, regional, local, school levels. According to the OECD, placing more decision-making authority at lower levels of the educational system has been a key aim in the restructuring and systemic reform in many countries since the early 1980s[2]. This was the case for England, France and Italy, three countries larger than California; for Spain, which with a population of around 40 millions habitants is the equivalent of a large US State and Sweden, which with a population of 10 millions habitants can be considered equivalent to a medium sized US State such as Michigan. This paper will provide an analysis of the loci of decision-making changes in these five European countries and it will try to identify the trends in these reforms.

Table 1
Population, area, and population density by country and some US States, 1991

OECD country or US State	Total population (thousands)	Area (square miles)	Population density (person per square mile)
France	55.596	210.668	269
Italy	57.772	113.521	509
Spain	39.385	192.819	204
Sweden	8.564	192.819	54
United Kingdom	57.515	93.278	617
California	30.380	163.707	186
New York	18.058	54.475	331
New Jersey	7.760	8.722	890
Michigan	9.368	96.810	97
Vermont	567	9.615	59

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract Of The United States, 1992

The timing of these reforms has been the following:

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Table 2
Timing of main education reforms on decentralisation and autonomy in 5 European countries after 1985

OECD country	Reform	Main features	Year
England	Education Reform Act	Establishment of the system of Local Management of Schools (LMS); creation of the grant-maintained schools; framework for a common core curriculum; introduction of compulsory assessment of all pupils at the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16 years.	1988
France	Decentralisation Bill	More competencies and duties to all intermediate government levels at all education levels	1983
	Orientation Bill	More competencies to primary education schools in the instructional domains	1989
Italy	Bill on the autonomy of schools	More competencies to schools in the methodological, managerial, organisational, and curricular domains.	1997
Spain	Organic Act on the Right to Education (LODE: Ley Organica reguladora del Derecho a la Educación)	Educational rights and financial rules	1985
	Organic Act on the General Arrangemnet of the Educdational System (LOGSE: Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo)	Organisation of non university education system	1990
	Organic Act on Participation, Assessment and management of Schools (LOPEG: Ley Organica de Participation, Evaluation y Gobierno de los Centros Docentes)	Competencies of schools and evaluation	1995
Sweden	Education Act	Decentralisation of responsibilities and decision-making in the school sector: municipalities become responsible for teachers, other staff categories and school activities	1985
	Government Bill proposing a goal- and result oriented governing system for the schools	Greater autonomy of local authorities in administrating the education system within a framework laid down by the Government and the Parliament	1988
	State regulation of the municipal appointment of teachers is abolished	Municipalities have overall responsibility for running schools	1991
	New curriculum and Education Act	Abolition of most detailed regulations. The state grants for teachers' salaries are replaced by a school sector grant that could be used freely	1991

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These reforms aimed to re-design the loci of decision-making between the government levels, to modify the modes of decision at these levels and to re-distribute the domains of decision. This process implied therefore a substantial change of competencies and capacities in decision-making, which ultimately implemented a new accountability framework.

The restructuring of the loci of decision-making is embedded in a series of educational myths and expectations which are far from proved. Various motives supported this trend, but summing up one can say that the most common argument in favour of decentralisation and of the autonomy of the schools is the belief that they will « enhance the quality, effectiveness and responsiveness of schooling »[3], that « education is more effective when programmes can adapt to local conditions and when decisions are taken by those who are directly involved »[4] and finally that education results improve when more decisions are taken closer to the school level. These are controversial issues indeed. If we accept as valid these aims, we should figure out assessment processes organised for checking their validity. This implies a conceptual framework linking educational outcomes, levels of competencies in education government and loci of decision-making. Such a framework is crucial for defining functional links between the re-distribution of competencies and goals to be achieved. A pre-requisite of the project design is the development of a conceptual frame organising clear connections between levels of government, modes of decision, domains of decision and goals or more simply expectations. Unfortunately, the rationality of reform process doesn't have a such high level of transparency and clarity.

In fact, it is difficult to verify if decentralisation increases efficiency, improves financial control, reduces bureaucracy, stimulates responsiveness to local communities and creative management of human resources, improves the potential for innovation and creates more incentives for improving the quality of schooling. Another hypothesis could suggest that the aims of reforms focused on the decentralisation and autonomy of schools are very different from the explicit goals indicated to legitimate them. The analysis of the patterns of decentralisation reveals that this procedure is far from being simple and mechanical. For example, the increased decision-making competencies of the schools doesn't imply a corresponding decrease of decision-making competencies at other levels of government. In other words, the process is not a Ø sum operation. In fact, OECD already noted that « simultaneously, there have been frequent examples of strengthening the influence of the central authorities in some areas. For example, a freeing of « process » and financial regulations may be accompanied by an increase in the control of output from the centre, and by national curriculum frameworks. »[5] Already in 1993, OECD commented that « at the same time, other changes have further centralised some aspects of the education system, limiting the options of schools and local authorities. These changes are responses to calls for increased accountability, consistency, high standards, and national competitiveness ».[6] It would be therefore worthwhile to identify the real goals at stake and to compare them with the explicit goals. One can suspect that the real issues go well beyond the improvement of the quality of education, a classical output driven approach. The problem here is the control of the process itself, the development of a new configuration of power which makes irrelevant the old forms of control. It is therefore convenient and easy to modify the loci of decision-making without changing the levels of expertise and the competencies of teachers and local authorities. The main result of such a process will be the exposure of teachers and local authorities to levels of

responsibility that they never had in the past and that they cannot at all manage, thereby leaving the central authorities free to impose new forms of control and new guidelines in accordance with the technical changes of bureaucratic power.

2. The conceptual framework of autonomy and decentralisation of power in bureaucratic organisations

In the last decades OECD investigated decision-making patterns in primary, lower and upper secondary education three times: in 1990/91, in 1992/93 and in 1997/98. The conceptual framework of the questionnaires didn't basically change between these investigations. Each time three dimensions have been taken into account: the locus of decision-making, the mode of decision-making and the domains of decision-making. The survey instrument consisted of a list of 35 decision items selected to be typical of the range of decisions taken in educational systems. Despite the similarity of the conceptual framework, OECD clearly indicates that results between 1992/93 and 1997/98 surveys cannot be compared because of differences in the procedure for collecting data and the instruments used. The major discrepancy between 1997/98 survey and the others is related to the fact that these refer to what laws and regulations specify should happen and not to what actually happens. On the contrary, the data of 1997/98 refers to actual decision-making practice and does not describe formal regulations.[7] The first two surveys are well documented in a technical report published by OECD in 1995[8]. OECD didn't publish yet any technical information on the 1997/98 survey. The data has been processed by OECD and has generated three clusters of indicators on decision-making characteristics published in EAG 1992, EAG 1993 and EAG 1998. Since significant differences in decision-making patterns between the levels of education are very limited, OECD considered that patterns in lower secondary education

are broadly representative for decision-making in initial education and therefore form the basis for the presentation of the indicators.

3. Indicators of loci of decision-making: the OECD surveys

The main results of the first and second OECD survey on decision-making patterns done in 1990/91 and 1992/93 are summarised in the OECD report on decision-making in 14 OECD educational systems. These surveys make a distinction between 4 levels of decision-making, 4 fields of decision and 3 modes of decision. Compiling classification using statistical analysis -- in particular factor analysis of correspondence -- the study highlights a number of aspects.

Table 3
Dimensions of the OECD surveys on loci of decision-making (1990/91; 1992/93)

Levels of decision	Fields of decision	Modes of decision
• School: decisions taken internally, including those that teachers are free to take on their own initiative • Lower Intermediate Level (LI): the level close to the schools, such as municipalities, local education authorities, district authority • Upper Intermediate Level (UI): the level immediately below that of central government, such as regional authorities, decentralised services of central government • Central government: the level furthest removed from schools from an institutional standpoint	• Organisation of Instruction (OI) • Planning and Structures (PS) • Personnel Management (PM) • Resource Allocation (RA)	• Full autonomy (A), subject only to constraints contained in the constitution or in legislation outside the education system itself • In conjunction or after consultation with bodies located at another level within the education system (B) • Independently but within a framework set by a higher authority (C), e.g. a binding law, a pre-established list of possibilities, a budgetary limit, etc.

Source: OECD 1995

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Table 4
Designation in local language of the levels of decision-making in selected countries, 1993

Country	Level Lower intermediate (LI)	Level Upper Intermediate (UI)	Central government
England	LEA (Local Education Authorities)		Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)
France	Commune or circumscription	Département or Académie or Région	Ministère de l'Education Nationale
Italy	Comune or Provincia or Provveditorato	Regione or Sovrintendenza	Ministero dell'Istruzione Pubblica
Spain	Provincia	Comunidad autónoma	Ministerio de Educación y Cultura
Sweden	Kommun, municipal council and county council		Ministry of Education and Science and National Agency for Education
United States	District	State	Department of Education

For the 14 countries taken in account, the analysis reveals that in the «average education system» decisions taken by the school are primarily in the field of the organisation of instruction; decisions taken by the level immediately above it (LI) are primarily in the fields of staff management and resource allocation; decisions taken at the level above this (UI) involve all four fields. Globally, one third of all decisions are taken at the school level, half of the decisions are taken by the intermediate levels and one fifth at the central level. These results confirm TIMSS data published by Schmidt and Prawat for 102 education systems[9]. They indicate that the autonomy of schools is limited and that schools are specialised in the instructional sector[10].

Table 5
Levels and fields of decision-making in certain OECD countries (ISCED level 2, Public) 1992/93

Level	OI	PS	PM	RA	Total	Proportion of decisions taken
School	52	18	15	16	100	38
Lower intermediate (LI)	7	16	35	42	100	31
Upper intermediate(UI)	10	39	23	28	100	12
Central	7	49	30	14	100	19

Source: OECD 1995

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Table 5 shows that in OECD countries at the beginning of the nineties the results concerning the school level, e.g. the level concerning strictly speaking the autonomy of schools, shows that they take 38 per cent of the decisions affecting their functioning, of which 52 per cent concern the organisation of instruction and 18 per cent educational planning and structures. It will be interesting to compare this conclusion with the data collected some years later concerning the effective decision-making autonomy of the schools.

At the opposite level of decision-making -- the central one -- the situation is similar: the number of decisions at the national level is low: only 19 per cent of decisions are taken at this level, but «virtually all in full autonomy since it consults to a very limited extent with the lower levels». (OECD, 1995). According to OECD, « there is no, or no longer, what could be called a « centralised » public education system, if this is meant, for example, a system where the national level takes more than half of the decisions and where the school takes less than a third » (ibid.).

Table 6
Proportion of decisions by countries and fields at school level, ISCED level 2, public sector 1992/93

Nation	OI	PS	PM	RA	Proportion of decisions taken
France	64	-	13	23	31
Spain	80	-	8	12	28
Sweden	46	22	17	15	48
United States	73	19	8	-	26

Source: OECD 1995

Comparing countries, it appears that in Sweden schools have the largest degree of autonomy in respect to the other countries of our sample (table 6)[11] and that Swedish schools can take decisions in all four fields. Probably, the first factor has an influence on the second one. The schools of the other countries have less power but they have more competencies in the field of organisation of instruction.

The analysis of the 1990/91 and 1992/93 studies drew attention on the role of the intermediate levels, the part they play with respect to fields and modes of decision and the interactions between the intermediate levels and the two other levels (the school and the central one). The combination of fields of competencies and modes of decision-making allows a large set of policy strategies. OECD studies confirm that all national education systems differ: it is not possible to identify a similar structure of the loci of decision-making, but, using a factor analysis of correspondence which allows to process a considerable amount of information and to produce a hierarchical classification of observations, it is possible to differentiate very sharply the « individuals » (in this case the various national education systems) and the relationships that exist between them and the structural decision variables. Doing this, the authors of the OECD report tried to measure more accurately and more comprehensively the proximity of the education systems in order to discover patterns and similarities among them (OECD 1995). This analysis identified clusters of national education systems around some common features of their own decision-making structure. We will not discuss here this very interesting classification because our interest is focused on the autonomy of school. The degree of autonomy is the result of several factors: the number of decision that schools take, the predominant field of decisions taken at school level and the mode of decisions. We have already noted that schools mostly have decision-making competencies in

the field of organisation of instruction. We can anticipate that the number of decisions taken in full autonomy is low (Table 10). With which levels and under which conditions are school decision-making competencies connected? The answer is quite clear: mostly with the lower intermediate level. A main characteristic of the decentralisation trend is an extension of competencies at the grassroots levels, the school and the low intermediate level (Table 7). This combination is particularly strong in Sweden.

Table 7
Proportion of decisions taken by levels and by countries, 1992/93

Nation	School	LI	School + LI	UI	Central	Total
France	31	n.a.	n.a.	36	33	n.a.
Spain	28	26	54	13	33	100
Sweden	48	48	96	-	4	100
United States	26	71	97	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Switzerland	10	40	50	50	-	100

Source: OECD 1995

Table 7 figures confirm the concentration of power between schools and local levels, with the exception of France. It is probably for this reason that the french educational system continues to be considered high centralised. This is erroneous, because the decision-making competence in France is distributed equally between the levels, which is not the case in other countries. We have included Switzerland in this table, which has a very specific structure of decision-making in education. In Switzerland too, the conjunction of decisions at school and low levels is high and more or less similar to the spanish figure, but the distribution of power between schools and low level is very different: in Switzerland, schools have very limited power and the low level is strong; in Spain, on the contrary, competencies are equally distributed between school and low

levels. This observation allows us to draw attention to the need to analyse the types of decisions and to avoid taking into account only the proportion of decisions that the various levels can take (Table 8).

As OECD report of 1995 notes « there is a rational sharing of powers between the school and the local level - with the school dealing with the organisation of instruction and the local level with management matters».

Table 8
Fields of decision-making at the lower intermediate level (LI), ISCED level 2, Public sector, 1992/93

Nation	OI	PS	PM	RA	Proportion of decisions taken
France	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Spain	-	-	32	68	26
Sweden	7	22	34	37	48
United States	9	24	32	35	71

Source: OECD 1995

The LI level has limited competencies in the field of organisation of instruction. The low involvement of this level in this field is compensated by a higher involvement of schools in instructional matters. Again, as we have already noted, at the school level, the higher the total proportion of decisions taken by a level, the wider the distribution of competencies in all the fields. Power is diversified between the four fields and is not concentrated in one single field. This is the case for Sweden and United States (Table 8).

We have now to examine how decisions are taken, e.g. the modes of decision by fields of decision-making (Table 9).

Table 9
Modes and fields of decision-making (Public), ISCED level 2, 1992/93

Modes of decisions at ISCED level 2	OI	PS	PM	RA	Proportion of decisions taken
Autonomy	24	25	25	26	52
Consultation	14	19	32	36	15
Set framework	32	28	22	18	33

Source: OECD, 1995

The table doesn't display the proportion of decisions by modes and by loci of decision-making. It indicates that at ISCED level 2, 52 per cent of decisions are taken autonomously, but we don't know what proportion of these autonomous decisions are taken at the school level or at the intermediate low level. We will try to catch this aspect in Table 10. Table 9 indicates that in lower secondary education the autonomous decisions taken at the various loci of decision-making within the education system are divided almost perfectly evenly between the four fields. Decisions taken in consultation are more frequent in the field of personnel management and resource allocation. In the OECD report, it is suggested that this result is probably due to the fact that the use of consultation is predominant at the local level which has in most cases the responsibility in these two fields. But, it is impossible to say if this mode of decision is associated with these fields or if it is the most appropriate mode of decision of the intermediate lower level. Finally, it is interesting to note that decisions taken within a framework set by another level are more frequent in the case of the organisation of instruction. If one considers that this field of decision is very common at school level and moreover that this mode of decision is more frequent at school level than at the other levels, this result is not surprising. It indicates by the way that education systems control and limit the autonomy of schools.

Table 10
Proportion of decisions at school level by mode of decision, ISCED level 2, Public in percentage, 1992/93

Nations	Decisions taken by schools (1)	Taken in full autonomy (2)	Taken at other loci after schools consultation (3)	Total of decisions involving schools (4)=(1)+(3)
France	31	13	10	41
Spain	28	10	7	35
Sweden	48	14	4	52
United States	26	5	24	50
Switzerland	10	0	10	20

Source: OECD 1995

If we consider the last column indicating the proportion of decisions in which schools are involved and therefore the potential influence of the schools, it appears that Swiss schools are the least autonomous. Out of 34 decisions concerning schools, in Switzerland, as an average, the schools are involved in only 20 per cent of decisions, in comparison with 52 per cent in Sweden, 50 per cent in United States and 41 per cent in France. Moreover, Swiss schools don't have any competence to take decisions in full autonomy: for any decision Swiss schools are obliged to consult other loci of decisions or to respect a framework set by a higher authority. Moreover they are only consulted by these authorities in a low proportion. In Sweden and in the United States schools have a quite high influence on decisions concerning them because they are involved more or less in the half of the decisions. Nevertheless, in both these countries the percentage of decisions taken in full autonomy by schools is quite low: 5 per cent in the United States and 14 per cent in Sweden. In France, schools have a stronger influence than in Spain: 41 per cent of decisions are taken or influenced by schools in comparison with 35 per cent in Spain. Summing up, few decisions are taken in full autonomy by schools, but in three countries formerly very centralised -- France, Spain and Sweden -- schools are nowadays involved in a fairly high proportion of decisions. Therefore, we can conclude by saying that to understand the way in

which schools function it is necessary to carefully examine the sharing of competencies with the intermediate levels and the interaction between these levels. Considering that in most countries public sector schools take relatively few decisions autonomously -- less than a quarter of all decisions -- the variance between educational systems is particularly apparent when the different criteria for assessing the degree of autonomy enjoyed by schools are considered.

OECD survey 1997/98

The general trend towards decentralisation is confirmed by the results of the 1997/98 OECD survey: in 13 out of 22 OECD countries a majority of types of decisions that bear on lower secondary education are taken locally or by the school itself. The countries of our panel are among those where this trend is predominant. In England and Sweden, more than 62 per cent of decisions are taken by schools (Table 13). As already said, the 1997/98 survey cannot be compared to 1995 results. First of all, in 1997/98 survey OECD distinguished between six levels of decision-making instead of four in the previous survey (Table 3); and secondly, the survey addressed the actual decision-making process and not the formal one. This new classification (Table 11) is a considerable step forwards a better description of the decision-making process. It allows specifying the structure of the intermediate levels, which appeared to be a key issue in the decentralisation process in the previous survey.

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Table 11
Levels of decision-making in the 1997/98 OECD survey

Levels	Definition
Central Government	All bodies at national level that make decisions or participate in different aspects of decision-making
State Governments	The first territorial unit below the nation in « federal » countries
Provincial/Regional Authorities or Governments	The first territorial unit below the national level in countries that do not have a « federal » type of governmental structure and the second territorial unit below the nation in countries with a « federal » or similar types of governmental structures
Sub-regional or Inter-municipal Authorities or Governments	The second territorial unit below the nation in countries that do not have a « federal » or similar type of governmental structure
Local Authorities or Governments	The municipality or community is the smallest territorial unit in the nation with a governing authority. It may be the education department within a general -purpose local government or it may be a special-purposes government whose sole area of authority is education
School, School Board or Committee	School administrators and teachers or a school board or committee established exclusively for the individual school

Source: OECD, EAG 1998

Table 12
Designation in local language of the levels of decision-making and numbers of decision-making units in selected countries, 1997/98

Standard Territorial Unit	England	France	Italy	Spain	Sweden	USA
Nation	Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)	Ministère de l'Education Nationale	Ministero dell'Istruzione Pubblica	Ministerio de Educación y Cultura	Ministry of Education and Science and National Agency for Education	Department of Education
States	England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland (4)			Communidades Autónomas (17)		States (50) District of Columbia (1)
Provinces/ Regions		Régions(26)/ Académies(30)	Regioner(20)/ Provincia (104)	Provincias (52)	Landsting (102)	
Sub-regions		Département (100)/ Inspection d'académie(100)				
Municipalities/ Communities		Commune (36 633)	Comune (8100)	Municipios (8082)	Kommuner (288)	School districts (14833)
School	LEA (150 in England)	Ecoles (54479), collèges (5126), Lycées (2504)	Circolo didattico, scuola principale (13 159)	Centros scolares (49112)	Skolor (4981)	Schools (87125)

Source: OECD, EAG 1998

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Table 13
Percentage of decisions taken at each level of government, ISCED 2, public sector, 1998

Country	Central	State	Provincial/ Regional	Sub-regional	Local	School	Total*
England	20				18	62	100
France	32		11	27		29	99
Italy	39		25		3	33	100
Spain	3	46	10			41	100
Sweden	13				22	66	101
United States				2	69	29	100

** Total can be slightly different from 100*

Source : OECD, 1998

The autonomy of schools based upon the proportion of decisions taken at school level is high in England and Sweden (more than 60 per cent of decisions taken at school level). It is relatively weak in France, Italy and in the United States, where the proportion of decisions taken at school level is around one third of the total of decisions concerning schools. Nevertheless, we know that these figures require a further investigation that distinguishes the proportion of decisions by fields and by modes of decision-making.

In the perspective of autonomy, it is interesting to analyse the line « School » of Table 14 for each of the four fields of decision. These figures immediately confirm that schools are largely autonomous in the field of the organisation of instruction: choice of teaching methods, choice of textbooks, criteria for grouping students, organisation of teamwork between teachers, instruction time, opportunity to learn. The most independent schools in this field are the English ones; comparatived to English schools, US schools take almost one third less decisions in this field. These figures don't tell how schools take these decisions. We will examine this point later on when we estimate the net level of autonomy, which should be indicated by the proportion of decisions taken in full autonomy by schools.

It is in the field of resource allocation -- how to use the amount of money allocated to schools, how to spend money for teaching material and supplies, maintenance of school buildings, students meals, cleaning expenditures -- that schools have a relatively unexpected degree of autonomy. A large proportion of the operating budget is managed by schools themselves in Sweden. In France and the United States, schools have the same degree of autonomy in this field, but the decision-making process is more local in the US than in France where municipalities and local authorities don't have any competence in this field in comparison with the high level of influence that they exercise in the US.

The number of decisions taken by schools in the field of personnel management -- which include for example decisions on hiring and dismissal of staff, setting salary schedules and conditions of work -- is very low with the exception of Sweden where schools play a major role in this field jointly with local authorities. Once more, patterns in the US are identical with patterns in other fields: a broad domain of competencies at the local level combined with a small degree of decision-making autonomy of the schools themselves.

Table 14
Proportion of decisions by fields at each level of government, ISCED level 2, Public sector, 1997/98

Fields	Levels of govern.	England	France	Italy	Spain	Sweden	USA
OI	Central		13	13	13		
	State						
	Provincial/ Regional						
	Sub-regional		13				
	Local					13	31
	School	***100***	***75***	***88***	***88***	***88***	***69***
	Total	*100*	*101*	*101*	*101*	*101*	*100*
PM	Central	100	67	83		8	
	State				86		
	Provincial/ Regional		25	17			
	Sub-regional						8
	Local					25	83
	School		***8***		***14***	***67***	***8***
	Total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*99*
PS	Central	79	50	43		42	
	State				42		
	Provincial/ Regional		7	29	17		
	Sub-regional		43				
	Local	14				25	95
	School	*7*		*29*	*42*	*33*	*5*
	Total	*100*	*100*	*101*	*101*	*100*	*100*
RA	Central			17			
	State				56		
	Provincial/ Regional		13	54	22		
	Sub-regional		54				
	Local	58		13		25	67
	School	***42***	***33***	***17***	***22***	***75***	***33***
	Total	*100*	*100*	*101*	*100*	*100*	*100*

Source: OECD, EAG 1998

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In order to assess the real level of autonomy of schools, it is necessary to examine what is the distribution of the modes of decision at the school level (Table 15).

Table 15
Proportion of decisions at school level by mode of decision, ISCED level 2, public sector, in percentage (1998)

Nations	Decisions taken by schools (1)=(2)+(3)+(4)+(5)	Taken in full autonomy (2)	Taken after consultation with other bodies in the education system (3)	Taken within a framework set by a higher authority (4)	Other (5)	Taken at other levels in consultation with schools (6)	Total of decisions involving schools (7)=(1)+(6)
England	62	40	5	17		12	74
France	29	9		20		7	36
Italy	33	9		21		3	36
Spain	41	14		28			42
Sweden	66	40	9	10	6	4	70
United States	29	14		15		12	41

Source: OECD, EAG 1988
Blanks indicate that the level of government does not have primary responsibility for the modes of decision covered in this domain.

In two countries -- England and Sweden -- schools enjoy a lot of autonomy, if one considers the totals of decisions involving schools. Schools can directly influence the decisions concerning them in one way or another in more than 70 per cent of the decisions of all decisions concerning schools (column 7). In other countries, schools are less influential on their own destiny, taking less than 50 per cent of decisions of of all decisions concerning schools. The table shows a clear difference between the three Mediterranean countries and the two European Nordic countries: in south european countries autonomy of schools is less strong than in the North. In this domain, US schools are in a position quite similar to France, Italy and Spain. The relative high proportion of

decisions involving schools observed in England and Sweden could result from the larger variety of modes of decisions implemented in the decision-making model of these two countries. In Sweden, all modes of decision are utilised at school level. This situation indicates that schools play different roles in the decision-making process. They are not only executors of decisions taken elsewhere with a limited degree of consultation. We can therefore suppose that the autonomy of schools and the level of professionalism of teachers increase if the differentiation of modes of decision at school level is high. Data available doesn't allow verifying this hypothesis, but it should be possible to do so, using data of international studies on student achievement which are now available. The net rate of autonomy, so as to speak, is indicated by column 2, showing the percentage of decisions taken in full autonomy by schools. This percentage is very low in France, Italy, Spain and the United States. It is larger in England and Sweden, but nevertheless schools take less than 50 per cent of decisions at their level in full autonomy even in these countries. We could say that everywhere, school autonomy is under control, which is an understandable and logical situation for schools operating in a public education system and not in the private sector. Where the percentage of decisions in full autonomy is low, the percentage of decisions that schools can take within a framework set by a higher authority is high (column 4). Only in the US is there a balanced distribution of the modes of decisions at school level, with a similar percentage of decisions taken by schools in full autonomy and those taken within a framework determined at another level.

Domains and types of decisions in five European educational reforms

The organisation of the decision-making process and the internal distribution of decision-making competencies in the educational systems of the european countries included in the sample of this

paper have considerably evolved in the last decades. No doubt Sweden is, in this perspective, the most innovative country in education. The Swedish education system was very centralised twenty years ago and it is now probably the most decentralised among the European educational systems. In the next decades, it will be interesting to follow the results at various levels of this transformation, particularly from the point of view of the equality of opportunity of education and of the internal equity of the education system. It is probably too early now to assess the effects of this change. English schools maintained their level of autonomy after the 1988 Education Act. In England and Sweden the competition between schools, the freedom of choice for parents, the financial resources allocated to schools apparently extended the decision-making competencies at the school level. In France, Italy and Spain the autonomy of schools is lower than in England and Sweden. It is impossible for the moment to appreciate the Italian situation because their reform is just taking place. In France and Spain, on the contrary, there has been a timid implementation of the autonomy of schools, despite the relevance of the decentralisation process in Spain. Differences between the education reforms in European countries remain high, but there are some commonalities between them: the implementation of large scale assessment of educational outcome and the improvement of education statistics which allows to compare schools, countries, and regions and to provide sets of national education indicators. In a sense, the decentralisation process and the increasing level of decision-making competencies of schools are compensated at the national level by the development of sophisticated models of evaluation of education and schools performances. This trend has already been well described by House[12]. Finally, the analysis of these changes doesn't tell anything about the improvement of the quality of schools and of educational achievement. We can suppose that there is a link between these dimensions but this hypothesis has to be confirmed by results that are still lacking.

[1] E-Mail Address: norberto.bottani@etat.ge.ch
[2] OECD: Education at a Glance. Indicators 1998. OECD, Paris 1998, p. 292
[3] OECD: EAG (EAG = Education at a Glance) 1998, p. 292
[4] EAG. 1993, p. 62
[5] EAG 1998, p.292
[6] EAG 1993, p. 62
[7] EAG 1998, p. 298 and EAG 1993, p. 242
[8] OECD: Decision-Making in 14 OECD Education Systems. OECD Paris, 1995. The study has been carried out within the Network C of the OECD/INES project (International Indicators of Education Systems) and has been headed by Denis Meuret from the French Ministry of Education who is the main author of the technical report.
[9] William H. Schmidt and Richard S. Prawat, 1999: What Does the International Mathematics and Science Study Tell Us About Where to Draw the Line in the Top-Down Versus Bottom – Up Debate? In: Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Vol. 21 (1) 1999
[10] A level « specialises » in a particular field if this field accounts for over 30 per cent of its contribution to the decision-making structure (OECD, 1995)
[11] Data does not exist in the 1992/93 survey for England and Italy.
[12] Ernest R. House: Institutional Arrangements for Evaluation. In: Prospects, Vol. XXVIII, no. 1, March 1998